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ABSTRACT

As evidenced by the increasing awareness of metaphorical thought (and other nonlinear and aesthetic thinking structures) in literature on the development of composing and comprehending skills, teaching metaphor as a mode of thinking is an important function of schooling, especially in the English classroom. It is important that the classroom emphasis be on metaphor as heuristic rather than as rhetoric, and it is also important for teachers to be aware of the theoretical foundations of using metaphorical verbal thought structures for both language skill development and verbal thought development in adolescents and young adults. Theorists have found that metaphoric language development is a creative act of representation, yet metaphoric thinking is to some extent contingent on instruction. In the English classroom, metaphorical exercises can help students not only make metaphors but think metaphorically. Metaphorical thinking exercises are relevant in content area classes as well, for example in scientific and technical writing, and in historical work. It is useful in all disciplines to be aware of the poetic functions of writing (in addition to transactional writing), and teachers can make students who engage in nonliterary discourse aware when they are using metaphoric language that shapes their world views. A final area where students need to be aware of metaphorical language is in the revision process, especially when a process model of writing is used. (References are appended.) (SKC)

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Language Development and Aesthetic Modes of Thought

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As evidenced by recent publications, the issue of teaching thinking has, once again, become an important educational concern (Kirby & Kuykendall; Costa; Link). Also evidenced by recent publications, there is an increasing awareness of the importance of metaphorical thought (and other non-linear and aesthetic thinking structures) in the development of composing and comprehending skills as well as in the development of verbal thought structures (Bump; Geller; Sacks; Eisner). Teaching metaphor as a mode of thinking, for reading comprehension or developing thoughts in composition, is an important function of schooling, especially in the English classroom.

Practical applications of theories of aesthetics of language in the English classroom provide a means for improving the verbal thought processes of students, especially in non-literary settings. But the emphasis must be on metaphor as heuristic, rather than metaphor as rhetoric. The pedagogical focus is on producing metaphors as a means to understanding concepts (i.e., as a form of heuristic). As well, classroom activities related to aesthetic education are of a highly structured nature; reports of those doing research in the area of creative and critical thinking have demonstrated that creative thinking is best facilitated through structured activities (Perkins; Geller; Gardner).

While my colleagues (Sunstein; Rubano) have developed practical classroom activities for the teaching of metaphorical thinking, this paper will focus on the theoretical foundations of using metaphorical verbal thought structures for both language skill development and verbal thought development in adolescents and young adults. This means a focus on reading and writing in an

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aesthetic context, as opposed to a technical one. Exercises based on these theories represent "advanced" writing and linguistic thought development exercises; that is, they assume some writing competence. The primary emphasis here will be to discuss the generative activity of composing, but the case for reciprocity of language functions in the development of verbal thought structures and language has been made clearly over the years.

Language Development and Aesthetic Thought

One of the fundamental principles of language development to arise from the research of James Britton and his colleagues at the University of London Institute of Education is that, "language is a highly organized, systematic means of representing experience, and as such it assists us to organize all other ways of representing" (2). Britton's description of the social development of verbal thought and understanding is essentially an aesthetic description: "We each build our own representation of the world, but we greatly affect each other's representation, so that much of what we build we build in common" (19-20).

Implicit in all of Britton's discussion of language development is the creative act of representation, an aesthetic conception of language development. Philosophers such as Burke, Cassirer, Lakoff & Johnson, Langer, and Richards have long asserted that the impulse to make metaphors is basic to human conception (Geller 151). Britton's research appears to confirm that view. Linda Geller's review of the research on the "ontogenesis of metaphoric capabilities" also shows that metaphor use probably has a developmental scheme (151).

Lev Vygotsky's insights into the language development of adolescent learners, i.e., language learning is "sociohistorical" in nature, would seem to indicate that some development of metaphorical thinking in those years of development would be contingent upon the instruction given (51). Also, if metaphor is basic to human representation of reality, instruction in the use of metaphor would be essential to any English language instruction which purported to teach "thinking," or develop verbal thought processes. As Ernst Cassirer has stated: "But if this is indeed the case -- if metaphor, taken in this general sense, is not just a certain development of

speech, but must be regarded as one of its essential conditions -- then any effort to understand its function leads us back, once more, to the fundamental form of verbal conceiving" (qtd in Sacks, 1).

Functional Properties of Metaphorical Thinking

Elliot Eisner, in his "Aesthetic Modes of Knowing" chapter in the 1985 NSSE Yearbook, argues this very point: "The creation of coherence is a central aim in both art and science" (28). . . . If there were a greater appreciation for the extent to which knowledge is constructed -- something made -- there might be a greater likelihood that its aesthetic dimensions would be appreciated" (32).

The classroom application of these insights centers on "reconstructive" language exercises based on a curriculum of integrated language learning activities. Inferential comprehension of metaphorical thinking in reading and the production of metaphors, especially through revision, in writing as a means to concept development are essential activities for developing critical and creative thought.

Metaphorical exercises are not only about making metaphors, but about thinking metaphorically. This is in the tradition of Max Black, who claims that, "Metaphorical thought is a distinctive mode of achieving insight, not to be construed as an ornamental substitute for plain thought" (236-37) Or, more recently, Paul Ricoeur's idea that, "In service to the poetic function, metaphor is that strategy of discourse by which language divests itself of its function of direct description in order to reach the mythic level where its function of discovery is set free" (247).

Metaphor and Thinking in the Disciplines

It is not only in the English classroom that metaphorical writing and understanding has value. Metaphorical thinking exercises also have relevance across the curriculum. The metaphorical level of thinking is not a "high" level merely for advanced students of a discipline, but a fundamental form of conceiving.

Jerome Bump's article, "Metaphor, Creativity, and Technical Writing," for instance, reveals a need in composition research and instruction for a mechanism to teach the use of metaphor in scientific and technical writing, especially for the non-scientist and non-technician. He makes the case for the need exceptionally well, and documents the lack of instruction through an examination of current texts.

Scientists, for example, use metaphors for understanding, and translate many scientific/technical ideas (usually originally represented in the metaphor of mathematics [e.g., mass, energy, relativity]) into verbal metaphor when communicating that knowledge to a non-technical audience. But science is not just technical understanding any more than writing is merely knowledge of formal grammar. As Bronowski suggests: "The symbol and the metaphor are as necessary to science as to poetry" (36).

In history and biography, the writer's choice of diction and form recreates the personality of an individual or recaptures the spirit of an event. This is what separates historical and biographical writing from journalism. As Jerome Bruner suggests in a discussion of narrative modes of thinking: "The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads . . . to . . . believable historical accounts." (98)

Poetic Discourse

The use of metaphor, especially "extended" metaphor, in writing assumes poetic discourse on the part of the writer. The function of the poetic mode of discourse is representation of experience; understanding is a representation or reconstruction of experience. Additionally, as Art Young suggests, "The poetic function of written language becomes important when individuals attempt to relate new knowledge to their value systems" (78).

James Britton and his colleagues work on functional writing has produced a category system for types of writing. In the following discussion I will use the terms "expressive," "transactional," and "poetic" in reference to the functions of discourse and the terms "spectator" and "participant" in reference to the psychological stance taken by the writer. Very briefly,

expressive discourse is that which one does for oneself without reference to an audience; transactional discourse is, as James Britton says, "language to get things done," for communicating meaning directly to a specific audience; and poetic discourse is for the contemplation of experience, where the form of the language can take precedence over the message being communicated.

The writer communicating in transactional discourse assumes a participant role; the writer engaging in poetic discourse assumes the role of spectator. To quote James Britton: ". . .the more fully the demands of [the spectator] role are met, the greater the concern for form, for patterning, for organization into a verbal object, a work of art in language" ("Language and the Nature of Learning" 33). These categories become important because they define certain differences in the psychological shift necessary to move from simile or analogy to metaphor.

Most science and technology writing, for example, is seen only in its technical capacity (lab reports, etc.) rather than in its capacity for representation and understanding; it is seen as transactional in purpose rather than poetic (i.e., the writer is assumed to be in the participant rather than spectator role). The same is true of most other non-literary forms of discourse. Even in the "normal" writing in the English classroom, we tend to emphasize the transactional in our assignments. Students are usually asked to assume the role of participant in most classroom writing.

To quote Art Young, "Participant writing involves a self-interested part of the writer attempting to accomplish an actual task in a limited world (a lab report, an environmental-impact statement). Spectator writing involves the whole writer attempting to imagine his total world in response to new experience (reading the Communist Manifesto or doing a problem in quantum mechanics). . . . As James Britton says, poetic language is the language of being and becoming" (83-84). There is a need for a shift from participant to spectator to make the move from transactional to poetic.

In an exercise in which the student approaches metaphorical writing through the use of simile, there is a shift from transactional to poetic discourse. The psychological shift is from

participant to spectator in the the shift from simile (analogy) to metaphor. At the revision stage the shift is from the transactional to the poetic, participant to spectator, simile to metaphor.

One rather important philosophical and psychological distinction between simile and metaphor has been articulated by Jerome Bump (drawing on Paul Ricoeur's work). In a discussion of scientific thinking, he says, ". . .the truly innovative scientist often discovers that his subjects must not be regarded as mere mathematical abstractions, and he moves rapidly from the as if of analogy (simile) to the as being of metaphor, making increasing ontological commitments to a theoretical model, a sustained and systematic metaphor" (448).

Revision and Metaphor

The key element in the use of metaphor in thinking through writing, besides structure, is revision. Many claims have been made for the efficacy of revising one's writing in recent years. The exercises presented by my colleagues in this session are examples of deep structural revision using a rhetorical technique; and, they also point to the real complexity in dealing with simile and metaphor in the classroom (it's more than making a distinction such as "direct or implied comparisons" or the use or lack of use of "like" or "as") (Rubano; Sunstein).

Metaphorical writing (and probably thinking, as well) appears most likely to occur through the revising process. We readily see the value of revision in the movement from expressive to transactional writing, or expressive to poetic, but we also need to see the possibility of moving from transactional to poetic discourse through revision, because there lies some of the important verbal thought learning and instruction. The process model of writing also allows the concreteness needed for the students to make the shift from simile (or analogy), i.e., transactional discourse, to metaphor and poetic discourse. The prewriting to first draft stages moves the writer from expressive to transactional discourse; the revision moves them from transactional to poetic discourse.

Conclusion

Finally, though, how important are aesthetic modes of discourse, specifically poetic discourse, if the students need the "real world" writing skills implied in transactional writing? As Art Young points out, citing James Britton: "practice and facility in writing poetically may indeed increase a writer's effectiveness in writing transactionally" (94). So there is no "either / or" choice being made in the decision to write in the poetic mode, even in technical writing classes or in the social studies classroom. In other words, your students' expository essays will be improved directly and indirectly by the use of metaphorical writing and thinking exercises. The school writing most of us focus on is improved by the seemingly less "practical" activities suggested here. Classroom practice that includes attention to poetic discourse (not to be confused with the expressive discourse which passes for what we loosely call creative writing) is an essential part of the language development and cognitive growth of our students.

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